

The Social Function of Twentieth Century Theatre:
Antonin Artaud, Samuel Beckett and Paul Chan

Research Thesis

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How was the social function of theater changed since the Second World War?”

Unlike the growing fields of other Twentieth century media innovations such as film or radio, theatre has the ability to utilize the culmination of both mediums. This makes for an amorphous and dexterous art form able to challenge relevant social issues, while still remaining conscious of it as a form of entertainment. However, this is not to say that theatre always perceived with such nuance and esteem within society. Before the turn of the Twentieth Century the role of theatre while not irrelevant, was stagnant. “In the Nineteenth Century there was relatively little difference between drama in Manchester and Moscow... the way life was represented [on stage] looked very much the same” (Innes 4). Without a definitive identity as an art form, theatre remained unconscious and unaware of its own ability to become a relevant and essential aspect of modern culture. What became the catalyst for creating a foundation for socially relevant theatre to become prevalent in England became established through the writings of Irish writer George Bernard Shaw. Utilizing the prevalent theme of naturalism and manipulating its aesthetic purpose found in the recently translated plays of Norway’s Henrik Ibsen, “Shaw reinterpreted [naturalism] to form the basis of a rational drama dealing with [archetypal] social issues, defining modernism as a way that became standard for mainstream British theatre” (Innes 5). What resulted was drama utilizing relevant social topics while remaining rooted within reality. The tonal and social shift that modernism took from naturalism became further instilled within the cultural zeitgeist during wartime in England. The effect both wars had upon the arts is astounding. Whether in its earliest forms in T.S Eliot’s hauntingly serene epic *The Waste Land*, to its the subjective yet mechanical photographic lens in Christopher Isherwood’s *Goodbye to Berlin*, or finally in

Elizabeth Bowen's gothic short story "Happy Autumn Fields", literary art and its creators responded to the impact war has taken upon the artistic imagination vary in their own cathartic style. The examples with the exception of Eliot's *The Waste Land*, in fact deal primarily with World War Two. Why World War Two however? The literal and figurative destruction of European Nationalism, particularly England's in the Second World War's culminated with the historical events and the fundamental principles of modernism served as a catalyst for the fundamental and radical theories that Antonin Artaud, Samuel Beckett and Jon Osborne utilized to make the foundations and the success of both a relevant Avant-Garde and socially realistic theatre. "If stressing the unity of form and content is one characteristic of modern drama, another is the rejection of traditional genres, so that they are unconventional, they reflect the nature of the work" (Innes 8). Shaw catalyzed the modernist movement by modifying and manipulating the aesthetic principles of Ibsen to make plays more visceral, socially conscious, and relevant. In return the same evolution and rejection of the traditional norms manipulated by Shaw and his socially relevant theatre evolved again to remain relevant and continue to evolve the theatre as a medium. This with the censoring of Shaw from the stage during the First World War, helped establish newer works to be placed upon the stage, further pushing the boundaries of conscious theatre.

My thesis is not to argue that Shaw, or any modernist for that matter was not relevant in their artistic application in creating a modern and relevant twentieth century. What I argue is that the works in the theatre being released during and after World War Two, lacked any uniform or comprehensive thought regarding the current social consciousness. Rather, they were serving merely as an, "an exhibition of a painting in

which exciting shapes explode here and there but at random and without any genuine consciousness of the forces they could rouse” (Artaud 79). This culminated with the ephemeral nature of theatre and its productions only further diminishes any uniformity towards an artistic medium. “A play only reaches its full expression in performance, the majority of what occupies the stage at any given time [and] vanishes from view almost as soon as the final curtain comes down...only those whose plays continued to be revived remained visible” (Innes 11). At the inception of the Twentieth Century, theatre was understood as a bourgeois medium, that, “benefitted those who created them much more than those who read [or viewed] them” (Artaud 79). This rigid and dichotomous relationship between the spectator and player unlike literature or film did not make for a relevant or socially conscious theatre. Harkening back to Shaw’s methodologies and his manipulation of Ibsen’s naturalism set a blueprint where spectator and spectacle could become conscious of one another, “trapping the audience, sequentially manipulating and discrediting [and] their social responses, discrediting conditioned reflexes, and exploding the conventional moral categories...forced spectators to reevaluate their assumptions about the world around them” (Innes 15).

Going further than the ideologies established by Shaw, French Philosopher and Playwright Antonin Artaud theories particularly the “Theatre of Cruelty” brought to fruition a unified theatre capable of being a platform for comprehensive social commentary. Understanding the idea of theatre and its ephemeral form, Artaud wished to bridge the gap between, “the essential principles of all drama, [or the archetypal and primitive theatre] not so much as to lose their characters as principles, but enough to compromise in a substantial and active fashion” (Artaud 50). Making a socially relevant

and conscious theatre while still utilizing the basic principles of archetypal theatre helped bring to fruition the seminal and eternal works of Samuel Beckett and other modern dramatists. More so than Shaw, it was Artaud that helped rejuvenate theatre into an active and functional commentary for the post-World War Two era as seen in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. In order to understand how Beckett's link to Artaud, we first have to understand and dissect Artaud's revolutionary manifesto to theatre.

Let the Dead Poets Make Way for the Others: Antonin Artaud's Cruel Awakening

While the works of George Bernard Shaw and his inversions and manipulations made to the works of Henrik Ibsen were crucial to the inception of modernism and the cessation from the former theatrical norm of the Edwardian musical comedies of the 1890's it was in fact the radical theories of Antonin Artaud that grounded and concretized theatre as a platform for social commentary. Although Artaud's theories of Drama were first developed in *Le Théâtre et son Double* in 1938, it was not until 1958 that they were translated and published by Grove Press™. One may ask then, how is it that Beckett was able to utilize Artaud's theory if it was not translated until 5 years after *Waiting for Godot*? The connection lies simply in their mutual understanding and utilization of the French language and their mutual friendship with director Roger Blin. However, this is not to say that Beckett and Artaud did not share a similar aesthetic and themes within their plays. More of this will be discussed in the next section.

When one begins to think of how theatre and its role within the social and cultural zeitgeist began to take place, then one must look to the radical ideas of French playwright and theorist of Antonin Artaud. We discussed earlier that one trend within modernism or Twentieth century literature is to neglect and dismiss the previous notions of artistic

mediums. We have seen that this was also applicable to theatre with the emergence of George Bernard Shaw and his manipulation of naturalism utilized by Ibsen, and certainly the same case can be shown with Artaud's manipulation of Surrealist French theatre.

Born in Marseille in 1896, Artaud vehemently declared that drama was no longer capable of connecting to its audience, resulting in a lack of drive for creating social change. "Our theatre never goes so far as to ask whether this social and moral system might not by chance be iniquitous" (Artaud 42). A member of the French surrealists, Artaud felt that the idea of theatre as a medium itself had been lost on trivial narcissism of the writers. "Such preoccupation with personal problems disgusts me...as human it is antipoetic...seems to me to stink of decadence and pus" (Artaud 42).

The plays, which were being produced at the time, including the Edwardian musicals or the *Grand Guignol* plays of Paris, while entertaining, did not hold any inherent or practical value for Artaud. Artaud wanted to change the idea of theatre, and its role within the cultural and social zeitgeist. In his essay "Théâtre de la Cruauté", Artaud developed a critical theory which brought about a relevant and socially conscious drama that not only revitalized theatre as an active medium and voice for current social issues, but developed a new style of theatre that was abrasive and void of the ostentatious aesthetics found in the dramas mentioned previously, yet still proving to be entertaining rather than self-righteous. In order for theatre to remain dangerous and honest to society and its social concerns, then ultimately one has to address more universal and comprehensive themes, and eliminate the solipsism that Artaud believed existed within the current theatre of the time. Creating a universal sentiment however, in return required a creation of new rules as well as the application of aesthetic principles of Artaud's

surrealistic principles. This theory formulated into a full conceptualization which was released in 1938 as *The Theatre and its Double*. By breaking down characters and ideas into simple social archetypes, using the aesthetics and space of the stage in relation to the audience, and the philosophical notion of cruelty and shock, Artaud created a revolutionary vision of theatre that created a purpose and drive for its viewing to an audience, still recovering from the catastrophic atrocities of the Twentieth Century. In this case it would be in reference to World War Two. Artaud helped establish the foundations for the conscious theatre of Samuel Beckett and his exploration into universal human anxieties, which in turn created an established voice for the “Angry Young Men generation” of Jon Osborne. Artaud is responsible for the socially conscious theatre of the post-world war two society, and in this section I will give examples of Artaud’s theory and its relevance to a post-war theatre and audience.

Examples of Cruelty: Artaud’s Theory in Action

“Perhaps it means that at the point where we are, we have lost all touch with the true theatre, since we confine it to the domain of what daily thought can reach, the familiar or unfamiliar domain of consciousness; – and if we address ourselves theatrically to the unconscious, it is merely to take from it what it has been able to collect (or conceal) of accessible everyday experience”

(Artaud 47)

Artaud was not afraid to accuse the theatre of attempting to create an illusory reality. Unlike Shaw, who believed that naturalism and realism were necessary in creating an effective and moving play to which audiences could relate, Artaud argued against this. The realistic representation created in the plays, for Artaud this did not exorcise or materialize into any worthy moral ideal, since the audience is aware of the

theatre being a mechanical representation of life. This for Artaud did not reveal any truth for an audience to realize about themselves, which is where true change can be made. Artaud allegorizes naturalism to the medieval practice of Alchemy. Theatre had become the allusion of a reality, portrayed by characters, displayed through ritualized emotions, phrases, with plot structure that do not create an accurate depiction of what is inherently real. Nothing is structured the way that the theatre structures it as, in terms of plot, characters, or setting, no matter how natural or grounded they may be. As a result this promotes a false sense of reality, ultimately leaving the play and its meaning shallow and effervescent. Artaud wanted to destroy the conception of this hodgepodge of theatrical elements and return to a definitive idea of raw, emotive, shocking and comprehensive theatre.

Rather than addressing what would be considered an literal or physical, or true emotion, circumstance, theatre and alchemy both attempt to create a physical or true ideology that has social and monetary relevance from a hodge-podge of metaphysical ideas. The theatre becomes lost within the mind and diffusing its true meaning through so many mediums and ideologies. It eventually becomes lost and devoid of the meaning and purpose that aspired to create.

In order to return to theatre to its elemental origins, Artaud believed that first, one has to purify, unify, and objectify the complexities of characters and stage, creating a brand new concept that does not rely upon previously relevant plays. Taking from his surrealist roots and his impressions from the Balinese Theatre, Artaud states that the stage must be rigid in construction and purpose. "The stage, which is measured and circumscribed and has a density in space – movements, shapes, colors, vibrations,

attitudes, screams”. Breaking down theatrical aspects from character to stage into elemental and fantastical creations helps further break from this idea of a rooted reality, particularly in regards to aesthetics. By establishing the setting as a fantastical and alien one, this removes the audience from the notion that this play is not grounded in realism. This may seem problematic, however, due to Artaud’s construction of characters into basic archetypes of human behavior and morality, he is able to avoid that trap of alienating his audience into indifference, instead allowing them to look back introspectively on themselves. Artaud attempted can be seen within his dramatic adaptation of *Les Cenci* (1935). Artaud’s play, which was an adaptation from Percy Shelley’s play of a work by Stendhal, depicts the story of murder, sexuality, rape, violence, and vengeance at its most primitive levels. The story of Count Cenci and the torment on his daughter Beatrice, which leads to her vengeance and murder of her father, varied drastically from the original novel by Stendhal and play from Shelley.

“Dramaturgically, Artaud’s approach entails a radical and pervasive re-shaping of his source material...he shifts the emphasis from diegetic to mimetic forms of representation...Cenci’s demonic power is conveyed not so much through what he says as through the disruptive impact of his presence” (Goodall 119).

In Jane Goodall’s explanation of Artaud’s version of *Les Cenci* against Shelley’s version, Cenci is no longer given a personal motivation in his actions. Rather his whole presence as a character is that of a archaic and primitive emotion; acting as a demonic force that provokes the actual spectacle and setting preserved on stage. In order to arrive at the character to be an archetypal one, Artaud utilized the space of the auditorium including the spectator as one. “We abolish the stage and the auditorium and replace them by a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind...a direct communication will be re-

established between the spectator, spectacle, actor placed in the middle of the action...engulfed and physically affected by it” (Artaud 96). What Artaud is attempting to do by combining both the spectator, spectacle, and actor into one creates a synthetic response transcending destroying the notion that this is no longer entertainment, but a mimesis of the world. In breaking down the theatre into simplistic relationships of mimesis, scarcity of stage and design, and a synthetic harmony between spectacle and spectator, Artaud is able to develop a vision of theatre that creates, “a stage space utilized in all its dimensions and, one might say, all possible planes...no point of space and at the same time no possible suggestion has been lost and there is a philosophical sense, of the power which nature has of suddenly hurling everything into chaos” (Artaud 61). With his aesthetics and boundaries demolished Artaud’s vision of a cohesive world of theatre, required one last element to be affective. And that is shock and immediacy.

In order to create immediacy in the theatre, one must believe that what they are showing is indeed cruel and violent regardless of the subject matter. This is where Artaud brings relevance and morality to his plays. By deconstructing the relationship between the stage, and auditorium as well as any personal motivation or subjectivism in his characters, one is able to fully address true social concerns including, crime, love, war, or madness. (Artaud 85). Artaud wants the audience to be shocked by what they see, and this is possible due to the surrealist approach he has made within his set and characters. Goodall in her essay of Artaud’s version of *The Cenci* highlighted that a character has the ability to affect the setting and create chaos and disorder. This was demonstrated in the terrorizing and demonic force Count Cenci plagues upon Beatrice throughout Artaud’s play. This behavior then radically alters the mood of both the play and the audience who

are watching it, since the proscenium has been dissolved leaving only the audience in the same world as the actions and actors. The result is shock and horror. As a result of this shock effect Artaud believed that, “ this appeal to cruelty and terror, though on a vast scale, whose probes our entire vitality, confronts us with all our possibilities” (Artaud 86). With this notion of transcendence from the proscenium to the audience to the world, Artaud has effectively broken down the barrier between the theatre and social conscious.

Artaud’s theory in action creates depict raw, true, and visceral emotions that individuals can understand at its most basic and primitive level. Void of authoritative influence and expression, Artaud’s plays in return reflect the individual audience members, who are able to transcend past the idea of art and take away something other than entertainment. The Theatre of Artaud became ritualized and given a meticulous structure that had a purpose, and was no longer confined to one certain ideology (i.e.; entertainment), and as a result became limitless. By making everything impersonal to the performer and the author, the audience takes away the most. This can be seen with Didi and Gogo in Beckett’s plays, which will be explained in the next section. , While Artaud openly admits that this idea of *pure theatre* is simply a theoretical concept, it does not however create both a precedent for change regarding how the audience should respond to theatre, and how theatre can be more than just entertainment.

Antonin Artaud and his essay “The Theatre of Cruelty” served as the basis for the transition towards a socially conscious movement of European theatre, and away from the Edwardian ideas of the past. As Artaud states in his essay *No More Masterpieces*, “The theatre is the only place in the world where a gesture, once made, can never be

made the same way twice” Artaud 75). Unlike other dramas of its time, Antonin Artaud did not believe in creating a drama or performance that relied on the poetry of language or ornate structuring as seen in the Edwardian Musicals of the time. Instead Artaud believed in the destruction of our preconceptions of what theatre had been and creating a new one. Instead Artaud believed in the destruction of our preconceptions of what theatre had been and creating a new one. “It is our veneration of for what has already been created, however beautiful and valid it may be, that petrifies us, deadens out responses, and prevents us from making contact with that underlying power, call it thought-energy...the life force” (Artaud 78).

Artaud was far ahead of his time, and was deemed as maniacal, crazy and detached from life itself. Artaud spent the remaining ten years of his life being passed asylum to asylum, “In 1939 Antonin Artaud was transferred to a hospital in Paris, and thence to Ville-Evrard, where he spent four years” (Dublin Review, 2009). Artaud died in 1948. While detrimental to his career and finances, Artaud’s radical innovations to Theatre helped establish the careers of director Roger Blin, (director of *The Cenci*), as well as dramatist Samuel Beckett. In *Waiting for Godot*, both Blin’s direction and Beckett’s words utilized the ideas of Artaud, and help bring relevance and meaning to the theatres of Paris and England. Unlike the gothic, and retrospective accounts of war as seen in the past, dramatist Samuel Beckett utilized the ideas of Artaud’s “Theatre of Cruelty” and approached the subject of post-war society viscerally. Beckett’s play allegorizes the theatre has in fact been waiting for a play like this to become a fundamental role for the social conscious in the wake of World War Two.

Utilizing the elements, which Artaud created in his “Theatre of Cruelty” manifesto including archetypal characters, surreal landscape centralized with a moral and comprehensive goal made attainable for its audience Beckett’s theatrical debut further attacked and shocked its audience into introspection. Taking from his experiences as a courier and member of The French Resistance in Nazi occupied France in World War Two, Samuel Beckett exorcized his own demons, while simultaneously shocking his audiences with his sparse and universally dreary tone providing revelation to them also. The principles of Artaud came to life in Samuel Beckett and in return challenged the theatre to look at itself as an active and responsible medium of entertainment.

All Theatre Is Waiting – Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting For Godot*

We were waiting for this play of our time, with its new tone, its simple and modest language, and its closed circular plot...this new and yet instantly familiar dialogue forms part of our lives within a few hours, staying with us...it is our story (Armand Salacrou, January 1953).

Only a few days after the New Year of 1953, Irish Dramatist, Samuel Beckett revolutionized the theatre with his monumental *En Attendant Godot*, at Le Théâtre Babylone. Seating roughly 233 patrons, Beckett’s *Godot*, received considerable praise and damnation. “Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it’s awful” (Anouilh 1953). An exercise in boredom and circularity, Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot*, opens to an amass of questioning, however when looking through its inception and creation, one cannot help but see that Beckett’s play serves as both a continuation of Artaud’s *Theatre of Cruelty*, creating a new image of the relevant theatre that we have been in fact waiting for.

Samuel Beckett began working on *Waiting for Godot* between October 9, 1948 to January 29, 1949. During this time Beckett worked as a courier for the French Resistance, and the effect of the war shows through the plays setting. “The claustrophobic atmosphere, unreliable messengers and unkept appointments derived from his escapades [to Roussillon] on the run”(Knowlson 344). Using his experience as being on the run to Roussillon from Nazi seizure and imminent death, Beckett applied the universal notion that in fact the war has left all of us wandering, lost in the ether, waiting for something to bring us salvation. The archetypal ideas of loneliness and waiting found in *Godot* resembles and enacts upon the concepts and ideas that Artaud used in his *Theatre of Cruelty* manifesto, “The war years revealed the concrete reality of waiting...revealing the importance of filling in the time as they [Beckett] wait for their real lives to begin” (Knowlson 344). It was however Beckett’s involvement with Roger Blin, which helped, shape *Godot* as a continuation of Artaud’s visionary theatre. Roger Blin, both knew and directed Antonin Artaud’s *The Cenci* but was Along with very famous French actor in 30’s and 40’s, gaining him notoriety in the theatre cliques of Paris. Blin and Beckett became acquainted through frequenting the same cafes and bars. Blin was aware of Beckett and decided that he wanted to direct *En Attendant Godot*. After much debate on a theatre, they decided on the small Le Théâtre Babylone. Using the similar tactics, which he had used for *The Cenci*, Blin using Beckett’s work created a “shocking image of human misery that disturbed many spectators and contributed powerfully to the impact of the play,” (Knowlson 349). Beckett shared the beliefs of Artaud, particularly in deconstructing the preconceptions of theatre and its typical plot conventions. Beckett had already shown interest in reinterpreting theatre and its structure with his first play

Eleutheria. The play never came to fruition, however, “reveal[ed] Beckett’s attitudes towards the theatre of the past...parodying many feature of traditional plays and traditions of comedy and melodrama” (Knowlson 330). Beckett refined and reapproached similar themes in *Godot*, particularly in its use of archetypal and binary characters, and comedy. In this case the vaudevillian clowns Vladimir and Estragon, juxtapose against the Edwardian characterizations and inundated colloquialisms of Pozzo and Lucky. Both character couples juxtapose a predisposition of what theatre was, and what theatre will hopefully become according to Beckett. This will be shown in further detail in the section regarding speech and language in *Godot*. The setting of *Godot* also harkens back to the ideas of Artaud. “We abolish the stage and the auditorium and replace them by a single site” (Artaud 96). Beckett introduces *Godot* in three sentences. “A country road. A tree. Evening” (Beckett 3). This brief tableau shows the two tramps Estragon and Vladimir, “sitting on a low mound, trying to take off his boot” (Beckett 3). With no end or beginning of the road, the stage is left with only three elemental objects; man, nature and time. Using Artaud’s theory of sparse setting, Beckett is able to bring to life the idea that, the spectator, placed in the middle of the action...engulfed and physically affected by it” (Artaud 96). These two narrative structures help create the final and most important aspect of Beckett’s play, and that is making the play transcend into the social conscious. Beckett’s realization that the theatre must be shocking, minimal and reflective of the secular world that people live in the twentieth century comes from the language of the play itself. The utilization of language within *Godot* brings to light Beckett’s plea that the audience needs to understand that theatre is merely for entertainment, but rather a necessary medium to address social concerns from an artistic

perspective. Using effective metatheatrics, metaphoric speech, and abrasive jargon, Beckett is able to transcend the stage and place the theatre into the real world. This section will show specific examples of Beckett's use of Artaud's theory including characters, plot structure, setting and use of language. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* not only further develops Artaud's theories and ideas from *The Theatre of Cruelty* that "wakes us up: nerves and heart" (Artaud 84), but also allegorizes the idea that theatre has in fact been waiting to change also.

Nothing To Be Done...Beckett's Response to Artaud and Theatre

"*Waiting for Godot* does not tell a story; it explores a static situation" (Esslin 46). Referred to as a *Tragicomedy in Two Acts*, Beckett has already begun to manipulate the traditional ideas of theatre, before the audience has seen the play. Plays began as either Tragedies or Comedies. Using the Aristotelian theory, "Both comic and tragic action should contain a proper 'beginning, middle, and end,' and proceed in necessary or probable sequence" (Aristotle 4). Aristotle goes on further to state, "Comic error is neither painful nor destructive, whereas tragic error should be pitiful and fearful because of the (tragic) error the hero" (Aristotle 6). The implication of the tragicomedy is that the plot proceeds into nothingness, becoming cyclical in nature, becoming an exercise in waiting. Placing the plot progression within a vacuum of surrealist fantasy, *Godot* becomes a play not so much about setting as it does about human relations and character development. Since the play does not in fact resolve itself, the entirety of the plays two acts use the same plot progression from beginning to end. As a result Beckett is able to escape the typical plot conventions of "normal theatre" or entertainment, and instead build upon his characters and dialogue, using the cyclical plot structure as an allegory for

the cyclical nature of theatre and using his characters to push theatre into a new, but necessary direction of consciousness.

The pseudo-couple Vladimir and Estragon, serve as the unknown catalysts for theatre's change through their banter of Vladimir and Estragon, which leads to self-revelation.

Unfortunately, Both Didi and Gogo suffer from memory lapses and therefore cannot remember how long they have been waiting for. In order to fill the time, they banter back and forth. This in return creates an audience as an active member of the performance, remembering for them. Since Beckett and Blin have already applied Artaud's theories in regard to set and stage, the audience reacts directly to the characters. Though opaque, and confusing Vladimir and Estragon's banter is meticulously calculated and comments directly and metaphorically to the role of the audience watching Beckett's play.

ESTRAGON. In the meantime let us try and converse calmly, since we are incapable of keeping silent.

VLADIMIR. You're right, we're inexhaustible.

ESTRAGON. It's so we don't think.

VLADIMIR. We have that excuse.

ESTRAGON. It's so we won't hear.

VLADIMIR. We have our reasons. (Beckett 2. 52)

The vaudevillian vagabonds refer to the audience and their ineffective nature, and lack of participation in the play's message or the characters' struggle. Using Artaud's idea of language Vladimir and Estragon's speeches create "Speech [should be] used only to

express psychological conflicts particular to man and the daily reality of his life” (Artaud 70).

The pair goes on further to discuss the rustling of leaves and murmuring of voices, referring to them as the voices of the dead. Directing their attention to the blackness of the auditorium, Vladimir and Estragon refer to the audience’s restlessness and the moving around in their seats to the noise that they hear. Utilizing the Artaud theory of deconstructing the relationship between spectator and spectacle, Beckett incorporates and manipulates Aratud’s theory into a new and effective device to further gain audience attention and participation; metatheatrics. Much like Count Cenci and his Menacing tone that plagued the audiences, Vladimir and Estragon direct inquiry to the audience is indeed unnerving. Yet unlike the Count, whose monstrous and callous nature was directed at Beatrice, Vladimir and Estragon, attack and mock its audience during this bit of metatheatrical dialogue.

VLADIMIR: What do they say?

ESTRAGON: They talk about their lives

VLADIMIR: To have lived is not enough for them

ESTRAGON: They have to talk about it.

VLADIMIR: To be dead is not enough for them.

ESTRAGON: It is not sufficient.

VLADIMIR: They make noises like feathers.

ESTRAGON: Like leaves.

VLADIMIR: Like Ashes.

ESTRAGON: Like leaves.

VLADIMIR: Say Something! ... Say anything at all! (Beckett 2.53)

Beckett wants his audience to understand that the setting in his play does not solely reflect some surrealist landscape in which Estragon and Vladimir are doomed to be forever waiting in, this too reflects our world and its apathy towards forward movement. *Godot* is labeled as a 'Tragicomedy', which represents a dualist nature. A comedic plot in drama, suggests that actions of characters go from bad to good, with the character learning a valuable moral lesson, allowing him and the audience to in fact resonate this moral back out into society. Tragedy juxtaposes this notion and reverses the action by moving from good to bad. Instead it is left up for the audience to interpret what morals they are to derive from the somewhat ambiguous and escaping piece of theatre.

In contrast to Estragon and Vladimir, The boastfully cruel Pozzo and his tethered slave Lucky are the antithesis to the plain, direct and fundamental speech of our two vagabonds, in regard to the most important of life's questions including death. As an allusion to no longer being able to use the same ideas of filigree as before, Pozzo's grandiloquent and verbose speech describing the night sky and the allusion to death falls flat, compared to the brief and concise descriptions made by Vladimir or Estragon.

"Ah yes! The night. [He raises his head]...qua sky, it is pale and luminous like any sky at this hour of the day, in these latitudes [pause] ...tirelessly torrents of red and white light begins to lose its effulgence, to grow pale [gesture of the two hands lapsing by stages] pale, ever a little paler until...pppfff! It comes to rest...but behind this veil of gentleness and peace night is charging [vibrantly and will burst upon us [snaps fingers] pop! Like that! [Inspiration leaves him] (Beckett 30-31).

Unaware of how to respond to this eloquent, yet tired speech, the tramps respond to Pozzo's speech reply with mimicry and sarcasm.

Pozzo: How did you find me? [Vladimir and Estragon look at him blankly] Good? Fair? Middling? Poor?

Positively bad?

Vladimir: Oh very good, very very good

Pozzo: And you, Sir?

Estragon: Oh tray bong, tray tray tray bong.

(Beckett 31).

Estragon's overly mocking response in French, reflects both how Estragon and Vladimir do not truly understand Pozzo's metaphor for the night sky symbolizing death and its false appearance within the serene sky. In response to Pozzo's speech regarding death, both Estragon and Vladimir discuss death and the monotony of light passionately but directly. During the beginning scene of the second act, Vladimir argues with Estragon about the events of the previous day with Pozzo and Lucky. When Estragon cannot remember, Vladimir asks;

Vladimir: Yes of course it was yesterday.

Estragon: and here where we are now?

Vladimir: Where else do you think? Do you not recognize the place?

Estragon: [suddenly furiously] Recognize! What is there to recognize? All my lousy life I've crawled about in the mud! Look at this muckheap! I've never stirred from it!

(Beckett 52).

The two further argue with feverish and explosive emotion discussing the lives they both have lived unfulfilled.

Estragon: I've puked my puke of a life away here, I tell you! Here!

Vladimir: You're a hard man to get on with, Gogo. [Vladimir]

Estragon: The best thing would be to kill me, like the other.

Vladimir: What other? [Pause] What other?

Estragon: Like billions of others.

Vladimir: [sententious] To every man his little cross. [He sighs] Till he dies. [Afterthought.] And is Forgotten.

(Beckett 2:52)

The violent and grotesque descriptions of life explained by Vladimir and Estragon, matched with the vacuous and sparse tableau of Godot's surreal world creates an image of theatre, which reflects Artaud's idea of theatre.

“Every popular audience has always loved direct expressions and images; articulate speech, explicit verbal expressions will enter in all the clear and sharply elucidated parts of the action, the parts where life is resting and consciousness intervenes” (Artaud 125).

Both Beckett and Artaud mimic and mock the wordiness of Pozzo and Lucky's verbose yet nonsensical prose and speeches, ultimately leaving the audience confused and bewildered by the two “better” characters. Instead Beckett's two vagabond tramps carry the most effective and emotional punch when it comes to revealing the universal notion of waiting to its audience, destroying the previous idea's of archetypal characters.

Beckett highlights both a social and universal message to his audience however; that we all understand the idea of waiting. We know that we are all in fact waiting in some respect. Godot becomes a universal symbol towards mortality, and change.

Whether it is for the next day, the end of our life, the next second, or the end of Beckett's play, we are all waiting for something. This question then alludes to something further.

We see that Vladimir and Estragon are represented to be mnemonic vaudevillian tramps, forever isolated to wait on a lone country road. Unlike the play, the audience once having viewed this spectacle, have the ability to leave and take responsibility for not only their actions, but also have the ability to change others actions due to their mobility into the world, unlike the famous tramps surreal situation. *Godot* achieves the ideas of Artaud's radical theories, eliminating previous conception wordy prose, rigid structure of plot, the

deconstruction of the spectacle and spectator with metatheatrics, ultimately creating a direct and communicative play. The response created is authentic creating an effective socially relevant form of drama in the vein of Artaud's *Theatre of Cruelty*. Ultimately this creates a preamble to what an audience and drama can be capable of in a form that many believed to only be entertainment, particularly in lieu of World War Two. Beckett's use of meta-theatricality and stark contrasts between character and audience allows audiences to take responsibility and asks; if we are indeed waiting, then how can we effectively change it to make it better?

Godot went onto to be translated into English and premiere in London's West End in 1955, but was met with harsh criticism from both British reviews and more importantly the Lord High Chamberlain. The Lord High Chamberlain had established itself as a central role to British theatre early on in English Drama. Beginning in 1737, Henry Brooke's play *Gustavus Vasa* was the first play to be banned from the stage. Using specific standards and regulations, the goal of the Lord High Chamberlain was to in fact protect the audience and safeguard the values of theatre. Deemed as the "examination of plays" a council of examiners would be in charge of controlling and monitoring what was being made readily available to the public. "To talk of the public protecting themselves and being their own censors, is to forget that everybody's business is nobody's business, and that they do not even protect themselves" (Shellard, Nicholson 6). The forward and anarchic format of *Godot*, created a catalyst for "social realism" in the theatre that eventually lead to the downfall of The Lord High Chamberlain, after met with high praise from renowned drama critics Kenneth Tynan and Harold Hobson, deeming in their respective newspapers [*The Observer* and *The Sunday Times*], that, "at the worst you will

discover a curiosity, a four leaved clover, a black tulip; at the best something that will securely lodge in a corner of your mind for as long as you live” (Knowlson 374).

Beckett’s continued to influence and significantly impact the dramatic medium into a socially conscious medium. *Waiting for Godot* remains the seminal text, which established the shocking and cruel theatre that Artaud, theorized in his 1938 work *The Theatre and its Double*. Nearly 55 years later, Godot and Artaud still remain relevant and significant influences in both the theatre and the social conscious in New Orleans.

Waiting for Katrina – Godot comes to New Orleans

The year is 2007. Two men appear out of the blanket night has made over the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans, Louisiana. Dressed in dusty, tattered suit and pants topped with a faded black bowler hat, the men make it to the steps of a bordered up white house, sitting upon blocks. An X is marked on the door with red spray paint. A “0” is marked on the bottom quarter of the X indicating that no dead were found on the premises. The two disorderly men sit down among the shards of broken glass, toilet seats, toys, and sand encrusting the entirety of the ground. The man recites, “nothing to be done”, and the play begins (Beckett 3), an entire audience watching just 50 feet away.

Over 50 years later, *Godot* has come to New Orleans, and neither Beckett nor Artaud could be prouder. After the category five hurricanes, which decimated the southeastern United States in August 2005, New Orleans and its residents, became lost and waiting for help from their government. “Waiting for the U.S. government to rebuild and rescue a city that is still in critical condition is like waiting for Godot...New Orleanians are left on hold and every time the media broadcasts images of thousands of

Federal Emergency Management Agency trailers occupied (Kosidowski 25). The central notion of waiting which audiences of post world war two, once again became relevant again to life. Conceptualized by artist Paul Chan, *Godot in New Orleans* was created to create an, “Understanding that words and deeds have real consequences and that these consequences have to be addressed and dealt with, if the words and deeds in fact matter, made the play concrete for everyone on and off that stage—or in our case, that empty street corner in the Lower Ninth Ward” (Chan 2008). The play was designed to not shed light on the lack of aid given by government organizations such as *F.E.M.A.*, but rather create harmony and to bring back together the community while spreading the universal notion of waiting but not in loneliness. The play was set in the lower ninth ward of New Orleans, where neither props, nor stage were necessary to recreate *Godot’s* atmosphere. This destroys the boundary between spectator and spectacle, allowing the play to become more of a gathering, rather than a performance. Community organizers worked with Chan and his team for months in order to develop an event, which focused on reshaping the community, using the universal and emotional notion of waiting as its foundation.

“Admission was free, hot gumbo was served and a jazz band escorted guests to their seats, but the enthusiastic response exceeded even the most optimistic expectations” (Heller 43).

The play in turn created an ambiance, which harmonizes both the demanding social conscious of Artaud, using Beckett’s play as the vehicle to empathize with the situation. The play’s direct and metatheatric dialogue addressed by both Didi and Gogo, (played by New Orleans natives Wendell Pierce and J. Kyle Manzy) hit much deeper within the naturalistic and communal setting. The following lines hit with depth, reflecting the current, yet universal notion of restlessness in waiting.

Vladimir: “Let us not waste our time in idle discourse! Let us do something while we have the chance!

It is not everyday that we are needed. To all mankind they were addressed, those cries for help still ringing in our ears! But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not” (Beckett 70).

The play was performed a total of five times, and raised a total of \$50,000 using its revenue to help rebuild neighborhoods devastated by New Orleans. Chan did not see his *Godot* as a play however, rather he wanted to, “use the idea of doing the play as the departure point for inaugurating a series of causes and effects that would bind the artists, the people in New Orleans, and the city together in a relationship that would make each responsible for the other” (Chan 2008).

Antonin Artaud always said the issues of the world cannot be solved in the words and prose of theatre where, “people sit on a certain number of straight-backed or over stuffed chairs placed in a row and tell each other stories, which does not require movement in order to be what it should –certainly its perversion” (Artaud 106). Instead Artaud wanted a play which “rattled the nerves”, and in this he created a *Theatre of Cruelty*. Samuel Beckett proceeded with the notions of Artaud and created a play, which still holds relevance even within today’s standards. A theatre that transcends the space designated by an auditorium and stage, and instead an exigent theatre which harkens upon the notions of the classics of Homer and Aristotle, while remaining relevant to the issues of the world. A theatre of cruelty and freedom has been created that drastically has affected the social sphere and its consciousness.

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